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CONCLUSION

From this study, we have seen that throughout the Scripture there is the vital concept that an individual's deep appreciation of the living God is a life—conditioning phenomenon. The occupation with the living God necessarily works out itself in history in terms of personal purity.

In the Patriarch *Joseph*, the consciousness of a relationship with the God of covenant informed his moral choices. It demanded moral rectitude, with no compromise. In the prophet *Isaiah*, his encounter in vivid revelation of the God of absolute power, glory and holiness draws out honest confession of defencelessness in his presence. This is the necessary precursor to God's gracious purging. In [Psalm 24](#), reflection upon the awesome requirements necessary to approach the living God in true worship, leads the Psalmist to see beyond ritual purity to the many-faceted issue of moral purity, which takes in both relationship with God and man. He theologizes that it is both the holy demand of God, and the gracious gift of God.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we have seen that one definitive quality of those that have personally accepted into their lives the rule of God which the Gospel of the Kingdom announces, is the distinguishing [p. 368](#) characteristic of purity of heart. These people begin to 'see God'. They are transparent before him and before men. There is no place for deception and hypocrisy. There is also the anticipation of fuller purity in the anticipation of a fuller vision of God.

Finally, in the apostolic teachings of the New Testament, we found that there was complete consensus between Paul, John and Peter in articulating the concept that personal purity is the proper Christian disposition lived in the light of a knife—edged expectancy of the return of our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Those who anticipate the consummation of the future, in the fulfilling purposes of the living God, live pure lives in hope and expectancy.

Bearing in mind our discussion of [Titus 2:11–14](#) above, may we hear afresh the concluding challenge of the apostle Paul in reference to personal purity:

These then are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

May we also resolve to be models, by God's grace, of that which we teach, rebuke and encourage. I am convinced that if we teach personal purity and also live pure lives, we will serve the Church in our time and our region in a way that glorifies the living God.

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Mission and Renewal in Latin-American Catholicism

Samuel Escobar

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Like most of the Two-Thirds World nations, perhaps more than them, Latin America is in turmoil in several dimensions—political and economic as well as ecclesiological. The recent emergence of Basic Ecclesial Communities and the Protestant missionary efforts of recent years call for an analysis of their sources, in order that their effects for posterity might be better assessed. Escobar gives a detailed history of the birth of Latin American Catholic missionary enterprise (an analysis which has had to be reduced due to lack of space) in the three areas of self-critical redefinition of the meaning of being Christian, a fresh understanding of the Christian message in which the Bible plays a vital role, and a change of pastoral methodologies more relevant to the situations of the continent. These are the new and daring contributions of the author, both because of his own Latin American background and because of his expertise in the area.

Editor

Latin America is a region of the world where Christianity arrived in 1492 and was well established a few decades later. The fact that someone would consider it 'missionary territory' was the subject of much debate at the beginning of this century. Usually it was Protestant missionary statesmen from England and North America who described the spiritual condition of Latin America in sombre tones. The appeal to send Protestant missionaries was accompanied by a description of social, moral, and spiritual conditions that were a call to action. Robert Speer wrote in 1913:

The first test of religious conditions is to be found in the facts of social life. No land can be conceded to have a satisfactory religion where the moral conditions are as they have been shown to be in South America. If it can be proved that the conditions of any European or North American land are as they are in South America, then it will be proved also that that land needs a religious reformation. (1913:145)

For Speer the situation was not a matter of concern only to Protestants, but also to Catholics in North America. John A. Mackay, who was to [p. 370](#) become one of the great ecumenical leaders of our century, explained his missionary work in Catholic lands, at the Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council (1928). His words reflect the controversy that had been taking place in European missionary circles since the famous gathering of Edinburgh 1910:

Sometimes those who are interested in Christian service in South America are apt to be regarded as religious buccaneers devoting their lives to ecclesiastical piracy, but that is far from being the case. The great majority of men to whom we go will have nothing to do with religion. They took up this attitude because religion and morality had been divorced throughout the whole history of religious life in South America. (1928:121)

What would appear as a description tainted by Protestant bias at the beginning of the century was later on repeated by Catholic theologians and missiologists, sometimes with equally dramatic and sombre tones. During the Inter-American Catholic Action Week held in Chimbote, Peru, in 1953, after a careful and detailed study of the situation country by country, delegates concluded that in Latin America 'the vast majority of Catholics are *solo de nombre*: that is, nominal Catholics ... though baptized and believing in the Catholic faith, those nominal Catholics do not practice their religion or allow it to influence their daily lives in any appreciable degree' (Coleman 1958:20).

In the four decades between the year of 1913, when Speer wrote, and the year 1953, when the Chimbote gathering reached this kind of critical conclusion, there was a period

of intense Protestant missionary activity, and a steady growth of Latin-American Protestant communities. Like other missiologists, Speer was of the opinion that the Protestant presence was going to be an incentive for Catholic renewal. 'The Roman Catholic Church in South America needs the Protestant missionary movement,' he wrote, and in a way that some would consider too triumphalistic today, he added:

The presence of Protestant missions alone will lead the Church into a self cleansing and introduce the forces, or support whatever inner forces there may already be, which may correct and vivify it. (1913:237)

Twenty years later Mackay expressed the same opinion and even quoted a French Catholic *abbé* in Mexico who had expressed in reference to Latin America:

The best thing that could happen in the spiritual life of the Continent would be an increasingly strong Protestant movement; that would oblige the p. 371 Church to put her house in order, and get ready to fulfill her mission. (1933:264)

It seems to me that during the most recent four decades the situation that Speer and Mackay described has started to change radically. A new vitality is fermenting in Latin-American Catholicism, and some of the renewal movements within are now reaching many parts of the world, beyond Catholic circles. The most recently published history of Christianity in Latin America is an excellent interpretative volume by German historian Hans Jurgen Prien. He records both Catholic and Protestant developments, and throws light especially on what has happened in the most recent decades during a period of intense social and political change. Prien describes this period in his last chapter under the title 'Crisis of the Missionary Identity of the Church'.¹ Crisis is not viewed in a negative pessimistic fashion, but rather as an 'agonic' time (to use a famous metaphor from Unamuno), a time of struggle that is an indication of life. Liberation theologies, Base Ecclesial Communities, a lively Christological exploration and conscientization are all movements and ideas that increasingly find acceptance around the world. They are perceived by many as the contribution of a revitalized Catholicism to the church universal.

A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE BEING OF THE CHURCH

One of the effects of the Protestant presence in the Latin-American countries was to question the quality of the Christianity represented by the Roman Catholic Church. Some of the more radical Protestant missionaries denied that the kind of institution that had fostered the conditions of life in Latin America could be considered as a Christian church. Others pointed to the need for deep and serious reforms. Though this produced at first a negative reaction among Catholics, it is evident that in the fifties we see the rise of a new attitude, with a clear disposition to become self-critical. Maryknoll missionaries publicized in English the results of the Congress of Catholic Action in Chimbote, Peru, 1957, that we have already mentioned. This was a clear effort at self-analysis that did not spare words that sound as an echo of what Protestants had been saying for decades (Coleman 1958). p. 372

Application of social analysis and a more progressive theology reflected the real dimensions of the crisis. Under the direction of Francois Houtart, several sociological tools

¹ Prien's massive book is available only in Spanish and German. This author is a historian and a missionary, and unlike others, such as Dussel, has provided an account of both Catholic and Protestant history, as they interrelate in the last two centuries.

were applied to understand the facts, country by country.² Part of this was also an effort to analyze in depth the real dimensions of the Protestant advance and its methodology.³ By contrast, it was evident that in the observation of why Protestantism grew, some of the most evident defects of the Catholic life and ministry became visible.

Ireneo Rosier, a Carmelite from Belgium who had studied the crisis of Catholicism in Europe along the lines of dechristianization, conducted a study in Chile that had a chapter on Protestantism. The description of Protestant advance was really a way of analyzing Catholic failures. Some things that were essential and fundamental were called into question:

What attracts people in Protestantism is the person of Christ and his doctrine ... the beauty of the Christian life in small communities, the greater depth in one's life and the concern for saving one's soul explain the influence of Protestantism among the people ... Protestantism has opened the direct way to Christ, while in Catholicism it is as if the authentic face of Christ would be veiled by civilization and the complications of so many centuries. (1959:103)

This process of self-criticism acquired more sophistication in the pastoral analysis of Juan Luis Segundo and Gustavo Gutiérrez.⁴ Again, basic things are called into question, not out of a spirit of iconoclastic criticism but out of pastoral and missionary concern. The pastoral and missionary intention of these theologians has been forgotten and obscured by the persistent reference to what in their theology seems to be a call for political and social action on the part of the church. But some of the things that they have been saying have to do with the basic p.373 question of what is the meaning of being a Christian today in Latin America, and consequently, what is the mission of the church in those lands, and how is she going to accomplish that mission. Before the publication of his best-known book about the new theologies, Gutiérrez had written a short but serious booklet about the pastoral situation in the continent (1970). The spirit of that booklet is well summarized in a paragraph of another publication from 1969:

The Latin American Church is in crisis ... The scope and seriousness of the situation is of enormous proportions. Long gone is the era when the Church could handle questions and problems by appealing to her doctrines and distinctions. Today it is the Church herself that is being called into question. She is being called into question by many Christians who experience in their daily lives the terrible distance that separates the Church from her roots in the gospel and her lack of harmony with the real world of Latin America. She is also being called into question by many people who are far away from her—many more than our traditional pastoral outlook is willing to admit—who see her as an obstructive force in the effort to construct a more just society. (Maryknoll Documentation Series 1970:xiii)

² Between 1958 and 1961, under the leadership of Francois Houtart, Director of the Centre for Socio-Religious Research of Brussels, the social and ecclesiastical situation of Latin America was studied. Research teams were formed in fifteen countries, and more than twenty volumes were published in Spain. Though the teams were formed mainly by European and Latin American priests and social scientists, an enthusiastic sponsor was an American mission leader, Monsignor Luigui Ligutti, and the research was financed by North American funds of the Homeland Foundation.

³ Spanish Jesuit Prudencio Damboriena, consultant for the Vatican, published a two-volume study of Protestantism in Latin America (1962). Well researched and planned, the book is very critical of Protestant missionary work.

⁴ Segundo has written extensively about pastoral work. His most revealing volume on this issue appeared in 1972 and only six years later in English. (1978)

We are aware, of course, that there were clear differences in the outlook and theological perspective from which earlier Protestant thinkers wrote and the writings of Ireneo Rosier and Gustavo Gutiérrez. The missionary proposal that could be derived from each of these three visions would be different. But all of them point toward a new understanding of the mission of the church, that some way or other has touched the very being of the Catholic Church in Latin America. On the other hand, theologians like Miguez Bonino in ecumenical Protestantism and Rene Padilla in evangelical Protestantism have been exploring the way in which, at this end of the twentieth century, the basic question of the meaning of being a Christian has become a burning issue for the Protestant churches in Latin America.⁵

A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH

The proclamation of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and the challenge to follow him in obedience to his call, were central in the message of Protestant missionaries to Latin America. This Christocentric nature of their gospel was interpreted in relation to the cultural **P. 374** and spiritual reality of the continent, in a classic book that could be an example of what we say: John A. Mackay's *The Other Spanish Christ*. For this famous theologian and missionary, 'a common need presses upon the Spanish and Anglo-Saxon worlds: to "know" Christ, to "know" Him for life and thought, to know Him in God and God in Him' (1933:xii). And as Rosier remarked about the popular Protestantism he studied in Chile, it 'has opened a direct way to Christ.'

A stream of Christocentric thrust has become evident in the Catholicism of the past two decades. It is possible to detect it in manifestations as varied as the Christologies of John Sobrino or Leonatrio Boff,⁶ the evangelistic methods of the Catholic charismatics,⁷ or the popular poetry paraphrasing Scripture.⁸ What is especially significant for an evangelical observer is the new role that Scripture has in these pastoral and theological efforts. When Protestantism started to spread through Latin America, the Bible was central in its missionary action, and was practically an unknown book in the continent (Prien 1985:711-716).

An eloquent example of the kind of impact this had on Catholic leaders is the anecdote provided by Father Jorge Mejia, one of the most eminent Roman Catholic Bible scholars of the continent. He tells us how when he was a child of ten he found a Bible in his family library, and how he gave himself to its reading 'secretly, of course'. Then he proceeds:

But I was soon found out and severely reprimanded, if I remember well for two reasons: first, because I had exposed myself to the occasion of reading certain crude stories, improper for children; secondly, because the Bible I had found was a Protestant version. This, I think, was very typical of Catholic mentality among Latin American educated classes thirty or even twenty years ago, before the Bible renewal got under way. On one hand there was a certain diffidence about the Bible. It should not be read freely, lest some

⁵ Padilla became well-known because of his paper at the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism in 1974 (1985), and some of the work of Miguez Bonino in this area is evident in his introduction to *Liberation theologies*. (1975)

⁶ Especially Sobrino has now become a classic writer on the subject. (1978)

⁷ For instance, the writings of Jose H. Prado Flores in Mexico. (1980)

⁸ The gospel story was adapted in Argentina to the metrics of the most famous national poem, and Jesus was presented as a *gaucho*. A famous Mexican novelist, Vicente Lenero, has written a novel that is a paraphrase of Luke's Gospel, set in contemporary Mexico.

innocent reader come upon shocking language or descriptions. On the other hand, most available editions in Spanish were of Protestant origin. (Considine 1966:205)

This anecdote is representative of the fact that it was the Protestant initiative, and the observation of how Protestantism was able to put the p. 375 Bible in the hands of the people, that partly brought the biblical renewal within Catholicism in Latin America. This renewal, of course, had also sources in Europe, in movements that found adequate expression in the Vatican II Council. By 1967, explaining the effect of conciliar decrees in relation to Scripture, Walter Abbot, S. J., outlined how the Bible was going to be the chief source of theology and how the training of priests from then onward 'should be built around a Bible-centred theology rather than polemically oriented thology.' This did not mean an abandonment of Catholic tradition, but more precisely:

What has been swept away is the polemical focus developed during four centuries of controversy with Protestantism. A primary focus on the positive teaching of the Scripture means revision of seminary textbooks, catechisms and all other religious literature. Not all parts of the vast Roman Catholic Church move at the same speed, but the process has begun that should result in the restoration of the proper role of the Bible. (Abbot 1966:103)

By comparison with what existed before, we could say that Bible renewal in Latin-American Catholicism moved with speed. Mejia attributes a breakthrough to the presence of a German priest and Bible scholar that came to Argentina in 1938. Monsignor John Straubinger. He also points out the important role played by priests that during the post-war period went to study in France and received the influence of the French Bible-centred pastoral renewal. Love for the Bible was also characteristic in many of the missionary priests that came from Europe. This flourishing of biblical studies, and especially the entrance of biblical categories into missionary work and reflection, have been facts that can only cause joy among Protestants. Evangelical theologian Emilion Núñez spoke clearly about it in the first Congress of Evangelism in Bogota, 1969 (Núñez 1970). It was, he said, the most promising aspect of the Catholic 'aggiornamento'.

The Catholic rediscovery of the Bible has opened for Protestants a set of key questions in relation the hermeneutics and contextualization.⁹ in a field very dear to their tradition, they find themselves now before an unexpected interlocutor which is posing especially the dramatic question of the relevance of God's written Word to the contemporary needs of a changing society. At the same time, there is substance in the allegation that the new wave of North American p. 376 missionaries coming from evangelical Protestantism seems to be weak in the area of biblical training and conviction.¹⁰ However, there is also the promising fact that for the future of missionary action there is now new room for dialogue and common action.

A NEW MISSIONARY METHOD: PASTORAL RENEWAL

In the process of self-analysis in face of the growth of Protestantism, Rosier pointed out the way in which Christian life was experienced in the small communities as a decisive aspect of its attraction for the masses. He also made extensive use of the pastoral

⁹ Latin-American evangelical theologians, like Emilio Núñez and Rene Padilla, have forcefully presented the hermeneutical agenda in world evangelical gatherings.

¹⁰ Since 1970 the Latin American Theological Fraternity has posed the seriousness of this question in Evangelical missionary circles (Padilla 1985).

observations of the Jesuit Ignacio Vergara, who had made a study of Protestantism in Chile in 1956. Vergara was especially intrigued by the strong sense of personal missionary responsibility that the Pentecostal groups were able to instil in their adepts.

Another very important system of their methodology is the spread of small groups all over the country. These local groups have many advantages: they increase the responsibility of the followers, they facilitate constant religious practice, and instruction is adapted to the various categories of persons and small groups. Having the meetings very close to the homes of people, they are held at an hour in which the working man can attend. The personal contact between leaders and followers is easier when the area which is reached is small. The leader is one of themselves that lives their own problems, knows all of them personally and belongs to the same social class ... All this helps to the development of a brotherly community. In it the followers and the new who arrive find a familiar atmosphere, a sincere welcome, help in difficult moments and mutual union. (Rosier 1959: 107)

Point by point this description coincides with recent descriptions of the Base Ecclesial Communities, a pastoral innovation that has been hailed as 'Latin America's most important recent contribution to the Roman Catholic Church's pastoral practice worldwide.'¹¹ In the second chapter of his book *Ecclesiogenesis*, Leonardo Buff reminds us that in 1956 in the Brazilian northeast, Dom Angelo Rossi initiated a movement of popular catechists that was to become very influential in the pastoral strategy that the Brazilian bishops developed in the early sixties. According to Buff the spark that moved Dom Angelo was the p. 377 complaint of an old woman who remarked that in Natal while the three Protestant churches were lighted and filled with people, the Catholic church was closed and in darkness, because the people could not find a priest. Other writers confirm Boff's anecdote:

The bishops concerned over a chronic lack of priests, the inroads of Evangelical Protestants and the growth of left movements, joined with pastoral agents to design an Emergency Plan in 1962. Included was a section urging bishops to 'identify natural communities and work on the basis of their life situation,' and give lay Christians in these communities 'a more decisive role.' (Kirby-Molineaux 1985:1)

We are confronted here not only with a question of methodology, but also with a deeper question for Catholic ecclesiology, namely the structure of the church and her ability to be really missionary. The criticism of the massive nonpersonal church becomes eventually a criticism of the clericalism involved in a pastoral effort where there is no room for the action of laypeople. As some of the most perceptive critics of missionary presence pointed out, the danger for the church in Latin America was to depend too much on foreign missionary help, to the point that she would avoid dealing with the structural problem behind the chronic lack of clergy (Prien 1985:1040-1045).

Here we are at the central difference between the structure of the type of Protestantism that has developed more, and the Catholic structure. For this writer, both the missionary experience and the strength of the biblical argument are on the side of Buff, when he points to the difference between a church that is born out of the people and one that is imposed from above. The matters of control and authority are clearly linked here to the concept of the ministry.

The voluntarism and missionary zeal of Pentecostals and other independent evangelical groups are frequently criticized, but they have been a catalyst for renewal and

¹¹ A recent Roman Catholic-Protestant presentation of Base Ecclesial Communities has been published by *Transformation*, Vol.3, No.3, July-September 1986.

a driving force in the appearance of thousands of new congregations spread all over the continent. They constitute in the contemporary Latin American setting a vivid expression of what Luther meant by the priesthood of all believers. The great question it poses to the more developed and institutionalized forms of Protestantism is that of the loss of their initial vigour, either because of an adolescent clericalism or because of the loss of missionary concern.

If we turn back to the quote from Speer in 1913, at the beginning of this article, we have to ask again if it is true that the acid tests for a satisfactory religion are the facts of social life and the moral conditions of a nation. Is it possible to apply here the saying of the Lord: 'By their [p. 378](#) fruit you will recognize them' ([Mt. 7:16](#))? Four decades of missionary action, both Catholic and Protestant, in Latin America, can be put to the test. There is much to be learned.

CONCLUSION

Foreign missionary work in Latin America during the postwar period has had a renewing effect on the spiritual life of the continent. Some elements of the Protestant missionary experience have had an effect on Catholic mission both as a challenge and as a kind of model. Catholic renewal has taken those elements further into a creative movement from which Protestant missions could learn a lot. Contemporary Protestant theologians from Latin America, both evangelical and ecumenical, are also embarked in a fresh understanding of their traditions and their biblical basis in order to respond to the challenges of this moment of history. After 500 years since the arrival of Columbus and of Christian missions, Latin America continues to be a missionary challenge and an enigma. Let us hope that, benefiting from lessons of the past four decades, Latin-American Christians will also become a missionary force for the twenty-first century.

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Book Reviews

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Korean Church Growth Explosion
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